

Divine, Angelic and Human Persuasion in Perspective of Biblical Commentaries of Aquinas

La persuasión divina, angélica y humana en la perspectiva de los comentarios bíblicos del Aquinate

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Abstract: According to Aquinas, the appropriate way in which the free will can be induced to act is by presenting it a persuasive good. This is relevant to Christian culture, which introduces the value of argumentation as an effective tool for persuasion. Thomas Aquinas was convinced that one could not be persuaded to believe except by argument, seeing the theology as argumentative. Against later voluntarism, the intellectualist position promotes a culture of persuasion on rationale, from which the tradition of disputation and *Summa Theologiae* grows. While the first studies of persuasion in the context of Aquinas's anthropology and the gift of counsel as a persuasive goal-directing gift have appeared, this article will present three ways in which persuasion is present in God, angels and humans.

Keywords: biblical Thomism, apologetics, theory of will, argumentative strategy, angels.

Resumen: Según el Aquinate, la forma adecuada de inducir al libre albedrío a actuar es presentándole un bien persuasivo. Esto es relevante para la cultura cristiana, que introduce el valor de la argumentación como una herramienta eficaz para la persuasión. Tomás de Aquino estaba convencido de que no se podía persuadir de la creencia si no era con argumentos, viendo la teología como argumentativa. Frente al voluntarismo posterior, la posición intelectualista promueve una cultura de la persuasión sobre la racionalidad, de la que surge la tradición de la disputatio y la *Summa Theologiae* como tal. Si bien han aparecido los primeros estudios sobre la persuasión en el contexto de la antropología del Aquinate y el don de consejo como el que gobierna las acciones humanas por el fin último (J. Maciejewski), este artículo presentará tres formas en las que la persuasión está presente en Dios, los ángeles y los humanos.

Palabras clave: tomismo bíblico, apologética, teoría de la voluntad, estrategia argumentativa, ángeles.

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We live in a culture that seeks to persuade its demands in many ways, from simple everyday products to sophisticated justifications for ideological choices. Mere exposition or presentation of an idea is not enough, but it becomes necessary to offer a rationale. At the same time, it is recognised that for many contemporary people the Christian message seems to be unconvincing. Is this due to the fault in the transmission of the message or the attractiveness of the same doctrine? What can convince a man, what is to be emphasised? St. Thomas's reflection on persuasion as the proper way to convince free beings who are guided towards the certain goods may be helpful. The culture of persuasion presupposes, as a condition, the existence of freedom, but also of the universe as an ordered whole.¹ It is not surprising that in the *Summa contra Gentiles* it is the argument from the *ordo universi* that is frequently analysed, albeit in the context of an attempt to understand the rationale behind God's will.

Besides, what shaped the medieval Dominican culture so that it brought fruits in the form of preaching, art and intellectual influence, was the theological conviction that it is worth convincing others to the truth. This led to a specific approach in Christian apologetics cultivated among medieval Dominicans: emphasis on the correctness of argumentation and the desire to engage in current intellectual debates.² This led to a certain intellectual attitude, which could be called the "Dominic's option."³ Pointing to arguments and rationales that justify the truths of faith is part of Thomas' understanding of the *sacra doctrina* as a discipline described as *argumentativa*, so that its postulates must have justification.⁴

It is worthy to examine the manners of persuasion pertinent to rational beings, even at different ontological levels. God, angels as immaterial beings, who differ from each other in the degree of perfection of the intellectual cognition, and the human being, who, according to Aquinas, reaches what is intellectual through sensual cognition—pursue persuasion in different ways.⁵ If we accept the connection between freedom and the intellect,⁶ it will certainly translate into differences in the way of persuading. Although the simple act of volition determines the will's goals, the choice of means

¹ J. J. SANGUINETTI, "El concepto de orden", 559-571.

² A. DULLES, *Historia de la apologética*, 55.

³ M. MULCHAHEY, 'First the bow is bent in study', 78-90.

⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 8c.

⁵ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Heb.*, cap. I, lect. 5.

⁶ M. ZEMBRZUSKI, "Homo non est intellectus", 75-101.

remains undetermined and is vital to a decision-making process because it involves the coordination of various internal authorities described by the term *imperium*.⁷ Such an *imperium* has two meanings connotes the command of the will and requires the performance of certain particular actions. The second implies execution of the will and regulates the multiplicity of actions directed towards the realization of the adopted goal.

St. Thomas is convinced that one substance cannot move the will of another, that is, induce it to act, just because something good or worthy of the choice, is presented. There is no other way of influencing the free choice of another being except *per modum persuadentis*.⁸ Only God can influence human choices directly, and the actions of angels can influence humans indirectly through persuasion, that is, *per modum disponentis*,⁹ or by implicitly causing circumstances for actions.¹⁰

I. God's persuasion

The recognition that God's will can be determined by certain reasons that are not pure arbitrariness of His decisions is, for St. Thomas, the key to understanding the nature of God's persuasion. This is one of the fundamental points that distinguishes St. Thomas from late-medieval voluntarism, which, because the act of God's cannot be conditioned by anything, not even by the nature of God, dismissed as useless any explanation and search for the reasons of God's action or governance of the cosmos. There is no doubt that such an image of a capricious God has been caricatured in modern times by the New Atheism. That is why it is essential that theology highlight the persuasive fittingness of God's will by articulating its *ratio* or reasonableness.

This issue seems important enough for St. Thomas to discuss the point in detail in *Summa contra Gentiles*, cap. 86. Starting from the fact that God desires the good as a goal and everything else as a means to that goal, Aquinas draws a number of conclusions on the basis of the relation of the

⁷ M.T. ENRIQUEZ, M. MONTROYA, "Imperio y causalidad en Tomás de Aquino", 329-355.

⁸ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 3 cap. 88 n. 2.

⁹ L. HARDT, "In Favour of Dispositional Explanations", 239-261.

¹⁰ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 3 cap. 92 n. 2. It is worth adding that Thomas' cosmology is dominated by the vision of connecting the whole creation, including the stars, although it is not direct as in astrology (*De iudicii astrorum*).

specific good with the universal good. God's desire for particular goods is related to wanting the good for the world, though the goodness of God is not thereby increased. Still, the goodness of the world itself requires some things, while others are merely appropriate. At the same time, by wanting a given thing, God desires everything for the created being, that constitutes it –as, for example, when He wishes to create a human being, He simultaneously wants him to have a mind. The existence of the human justifies God's desire for the complete good, in which all beings have their place, because this fits the goodness of God. As can be seen, Thomas consistently uses *ex convenientia* arguments. In sorting out these references, he marks that "only appropriateness, sometimes advantage, and sometimes conditional necessity, are the reasons of God's will. And the absolute necessity is only when God wills himself."¹¹ However, this does not imply a "series" of acts of wanting in the will of God, because by one act only God wills Godself and all other things. Nonetheless, the presence of reasons behind God's will does not imply that something is the cause of His will (except goodness, which is identical with the will). This, in turn, leads Thomas to recognize the freedom of God, which he understands as being a cause for himself, "master of his actions."¹²

It is significant that Thomas further cites several biblical texts that emphasize wisdom as a motive for God's action (Ps. 104:24, Sir. 1:10 or Wis. 8:1). For example, the text in Rom. 13:1 in the Vlg version, is particularly relevant for persuasion: *ea quae sunt, a Deo ordinata sunt*, inasmuch as it indicates that God does everything through wisdom, and wisdom has its reasons, while things have an order of reference.¹³ He recalls this quotation in many systematic works and biblical commentaries, speaking of a proper order (*debitus ordo*), in which the cause precedes the effect.¹⁴ For example, evil (*malum poenae*) permitted by God has some reference;¹⁵ likewise, the goodness of the world consists in order, that is, an interconnectedness of all creatures.¹⁶ If God makes anything for the sake of the good (as the goal), and thus establishes order, then God's action toward the human being is persuasive by nature. Divine action does not therefore so much impose an

¹¹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 86.

¹² B. ADAMSKI, "Why did God not Create us in Heaven?" 9–19

¹³ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Rom.*, cap. 13 l. 1.

¹⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Sent.*, lib. 4 d. 2 q. 1 a. 4 qc. 3 s.c. 1.

¹⁵ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Io.*, cap. 11, lect. 1.

¹⁶ THOMAS AQUINAS, *De malo*, q. 16 a. 9 co.

unknown condition; it supplies one that fits with the logic of that order. By observing and respecting the order (this is also indicated by the relation of the first cause to the second), God acts in the history of salvation particularly through the *acta et passa* of Christ, the Word made flesh; his deeds, like the resurrection, persuade based on dignity.¹⁷ God draws people to His Son in a peculiar way, as St. Thomas notes in his commentary on the Gospel of John, by pointing to certain reasons and proving that Christ is the Son of God: whether by internal revelation (cf. Matt. 16:17) or by the miraculous signs He performed by the power of the Father (John 5:36).¹⁸

The presence of reasons inducing to faith, does not mean for Thomas, however, the removal of the merit that comes from believing, for the assenting (*assentire*) is not necessary but voluntary, due to the fact that it is based on *ratio persuasoria*. Merit does not have to rely on the absence of any reason or even absurdity (*credo quia absurdum*).¹⁹ This is how Aquinas explains these dependencies in *Super Boethium de Trinitate*:

if this kind of reason could lead to a proving of those things which are of faith, it would deprive man of the merit of faith, because then assent would not be voluntary, but necessary. Persuasive reasoning, however, derived from certain likenesses to those things which are set forth by faith does not void the meaning of faith, since it does not make these truths to be apparent, for there can be no resolution of them to those first principles discernable by the intellect. Nor does it take away the merit of faith, because it does not force the intellect to comprehend truth, but assent remains voluntary.²⁰

The fact that the act of faith has plausible reasons behind it, does not diminish the merit of faith for Thomas, because it still remains voluntary: a human can fail to be convinced by God whether by word or by deed.²¹

¹⁷ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super I Cor.*, cap. 15 l. 3.

¹⁸ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Io.*, cap. 6 l. 5.

¹⁹ See P. ROSZAK, D. DOROCCI, "Meritum in Aquinas and Martin Luther", 93-122.

²⁰ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super De Trinitate*, pars 1 q. 2 a. 1 ad 5.

²¹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 6 a. 1 ad 2. See P. ROSZAK, *Credibilidad e identidad. En torno a la teología de la fe en santo Tomás*.

II. How do angels “persuade” others?

Persuasion does is also central for understanding both how angels (free beings) persuade each other as well as how they influence free human decisions. From the biblical text it can be seen that the mission of angels often is to convince the human— take for example the angel who convinces St. Joseph to flee with the child Jesus and his mother to Egypt.²² Angels, however, can persuade each other as well. Thomas describes their relationships in the key of friendly persuasion, which is proper to free beings (and which accounts for the fall of angels). St. Thomas, in his treatise on the government of God, remarks that one angel can persuade another to love God *per modum persuadentis*.²³ He notes that the devil convinced a certain number of angels to his cause, who represent “a third part of the stars” thrown down from heaven in the description from the Book of Revelation.²⁴ In relation to human beings, angels act to remove vices and inflame virtues by means of persuasion; they cannot directly induce evil.²⁵ When the demons try persuading to something evil, they do it by presenting something good (*formam boni persuasoris, scilicet Angeli, assumere debuit*). At the same time, Thomas wonders whether human decisions would have been glorious if there had been no fall of humans and angels; he answers that the merit would be to have the power manifest itself in the resistance to the persuasion of evil, rather than being subject to the situation of choice.²⁶

Angelic persuasion does not consist in compulsion. It acts by stimulating, inciting or igniting to something (which is reflected in the Latin verb *incitare*), including in the case of sin, in which the devil does not force but seeks to persuade by some sensual images or specious reasons.²⁷ Such temptation is not itself a direct and sufficient cause of sin (which always follows from a free human choice), because the movement of the will is not necessary. The temptation can only effect freedom *per modum persuadentis, vel proponentis appetibile*.²⁸ Persuasion, then, is a way of moving the will virtuously or viciously.²⁹ Because God is the universal principle of interior

²² THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Mt.* [rep. Petri de Andria], cap. 2 l. 4.

²³ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 106 a. 2 ad 2.

²⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Sent.*, lib. 2 d. 6 q. 1 a. 5 expos.

²⁵ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 111 a. 2 ad 1.

²⁶ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Sent.*, lib. 2 d. 23 q. 2 a. 3 expos.

²⁷ THOMAS AQUINAS, *De malo*, q. 3 a. 3 co.

²⁸ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 80 a. 1 co.

²⁹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *De malo*, q. 3 a. 3 ad 15.

movement in the free will, (*universale principium omnis interioris motus*), the rational creature alone causes the will's choice.³⁰ In the *Summa contra Gentiles*, St. Thomas explains in detail that angelic action has the character of a disposition to choose (*disponens ad electionem*). Because the angel's action does not require a specific choice, the human does not always follow its persuasion; for example, a person may ignore the motion or advice of his guardian angel. Whereas, in the case of divine action, which operates on the level of God's own will as *perficiens* (the first cause)—necessity arises here follows as a consequence.³¹ It follows necessarily as through contingency. God moves the will so that it moves infallibly but also freely.³²

Aquinas observes that the devil reaches the human the same way through *mala persuasione*.³³ In *De Malo*, he argues that the devil can do this in two ways—visibly or invisibly, depending on whether his persuasion uses sensual and perceptible things as tools (as he did, for example, in the case of the temptation of Jesus in the desert) or by suggesting certain intellectual images or by influencing the inner senses. In this manner, when presenting something as good (though it is not), the devil acts in two ways through persuasion—to move the will or its disposition, since by emotional movements he is making the person more susceptible to sense appetites which are easily distracted and disordered.³⁴

III. Human persuasion

In Thomas' writings, the terminology describing the process of persuasion is rich and includes such Latin terms as: *suasio*, *persuasio*, *inducere* and *convincere*. Each of these describes a rule for persuasion, and in particular, their meanings reveal the value that Thomas attaches to proper argumentation.³⁵ The *Summa contra Gentiles* regularly uses phrases that to understand *argumenta fidei*, that is, what leads to faith, what is a sufficient motive (*sufficiens*) and what is not. It is possible to persuade people to Christianity

³⁰ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 80 a. 1 ad 3.

³¹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 3 cap. 92 n. 4.

³² THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.23, a.5.

³³ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Io.*, cap. 8 l. 6. *Super Sent.*, lib. 3 d. 3 q. 3 a. 1 qc. 1 ad 2.

³⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, *De malo*, q. 3 a. 4 co.

³⁵ J. MACIEJEWSKI, "Persuasion, Natural Rhetoric and the Gift of Counsel", 115-126.

when faith is a grace freely given by God? For Thomas, persuasion to act well follows from divine providence and its application in predestination.³⁶

Following Aquinas's understanding of the way that grace heals and perfects human nature,³⁷ persuasion or helping another person along the path of faith naturally unfolds way by "teaching or persuading" (*docendo vel persuadendo*). It can follow as a secondary cause of grace. Interior persuasion or movement is attributed to God alone through the work of the Holy Spirit.³⁸

Thomas addresses the difference between external and internal persuasion of the human will in the Commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews:

Now a man is made fit for doing well in two ways: In one way, by working outwardly; this is the way one man fits another, by persuading or threatening. In another way, by manifesting something inwardly; and this is the way that God alone fits a will, because he alone can change it.³⁹

As a result, God gives charisms (*gratia gratis data*) or talents to people for the purpose of assisting another person in the pursuit of God. The explanation from *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 111, is particularly worthy attention, where Thomas describes the conditions for the effective use of freely given graces and points out the differences between virtues, gifts of the Holy Spirit and charisms.⁴⁰ Insofar as the gift is susceptible to the movements of the Spirit, then "such a fullness of knowledge and wisdom is included among the graces freely given, that a man may not merely think aright of Divine things, but may instruct others and overpower adversaries."⁴¹ The virtue of faith differs from charisms in the degree of certainty that convinces others.

Moreover, for Thomas, the main difference between having an opinion about something and having faith is being convinced.⁴² A person believes

³⁶ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Sent.*, lib. 1 d. 41 q. 1 a. 4 co.

³⁷ T. PELLEGRIN, "Grace Presupposes Nature", 61-78.

³⁸ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 111 a. 4 co.

³⁹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Heb.* [rep. vulgata], cap. 13 l. 3.

⁴⁰ M. MEINERT, *The Love of God Poured Out: Grace and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in St. Thomas Aquinas*. A. KLOOSTER, *Aquinas on the Beatitudes: Reading Matthew, Disputing Grace and Virtue, Preaching Happiness*.

⁴¹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 111, a.4, ad 4

⁴² HUZAREK, T., FIAŁKOWSKI, M., DRZYCIMSKI A., *Fenomen niewiary w świetle dialogicznej natury Kościoła*.

that which is convincing. In the definition of faith, dating back to Augustine (*credere est cum assensione cogitare*), and taken over by Aquinas, there appears the notion of *assensus*, that is, belief is expressed by thoughtful assent to the proposition at hand. It is significant, however, that in *Sententia de anima*, Thomas is already using *persuasio* in describing the decision of faith. He argues that faith will be taken up only by someone convinced; otherwise, it remains at the level of opinion. In order to profess faith, a person must be convinced with a certain reason, because *per aliquam rationem, aliquid alicui suadetur*.⁴³ Rational assent distinguishes humans from irrational animals that, although they have an imagination, are not convinced by their reasons. Therefore, the ability to look for certainty and reasons in the knowledge of what is difficult, and above all orderly (that is, establishing appropriate relationships between things and directing them), and to convince others—is the task of a true sage.⁴⁴ In the service of this persuasion there is a law which has the power to bring about change (*vis coactiva*), far greater than human persuasion.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, faith cannot be reached by legal regulation – only through persuasion. This gives rise to a number of consequences, which will be discussed further.

Mutual persuasion of people accompanies history, and Thomas carefully records these facts. On the one hand, Eve “persuaded” Adam to eat the fruit. She did not so much persuade to the words of the Devil, Thomas speculates, because Adam doesn’t explicitly acknowledge the serpent’s claims.⁴⁶ Still, Adam observes a kind of “evil persuasion,” whereby certain natural behaviours disappear, in part through Eve’s example, which suppresses the force the natural law. Speaking of evil persuasion, Thomas writes:

either by evil persuasions (*malas persuasiones*), just as in speculative matters errors occur in respect of necessary conclusions; or by vicious customs and corrupt habits, as among some men, theft, and even unnatural vices, as the Apostle states were not esteemed sinful.⁴⁷

⁴³ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Sententia De anima*, lib. 3 l. 5 n. 14.

⁴⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Sententia Metaphysicae*, lib. 1 l. 2 n. 8.

⁴⁵ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Sententia Ethic.*, lib. 10 l. 14 n. 17.

⁴⁶ E. MARTINEZ, “Contemplación de la belleza y perfección de la vida humana”, 57-71. See also: T. GAŁUSZKA, *Piękny Bóg, piękny człowiek*.

⁴⁷ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 94 a. 6 co.

In his reflection on human conviction, Thomas also touches upon the role of prayer, which was associated with persuasion due to etymology. In his Commentary on the first Letter to Timothy, he writes:

It is called prayer, because it is, as it were, the voice's reason. For the persuasions of rhetoricians are called prayers, because they persuade; but it is done in one way in their case, and in another way in our prayers to God: for we do not intend to bend God's will, which is always prepared to do good; rather, it is in order that our heart be elevated to God in prayer.⁴⁸

St. Thomas points to the double explanation that *Glossa* offers, when he sees a request or interpretation in the act of persuasion – prayer,⁴⁹ or a better disposition to receive something from God.⁵⁰

Besides, it is interesting to indicate two interpretation of biblical texts that bring some insightful perspective on Aquinas' understanding of persuasion. It underlines the danger of admitting without reflection the reasoning that is far away from the doctrine of faith. This also shows the importance of apologetics in the life of the Church and indicates why is important to search for reasons once combating the false doctrines.

Thomas offers an allegorical exegesis of Matt. 24: 42-44, which speaks of the host who, if he had known at what time the thief would come, would then have kept watch and not allowed himself to be robbed. Aquinas affirms the role of superiors and their responsibility (prudence and fidelity in caring for the Church), but he also treats the thief as *aliqua persuasio falsae doctrinae, vel tentatio aliqua*.⁵¹ In this interpretation, the human soul is the home, over whose vigilance reason is placed. If the content comes through natural cognition (natural law) then it enters the soul "through the gate," whereas if the soul is persuaded through concupiscence (*concupiscentia*) or anger, then it is a thieving entry.

⁴⁸ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super I Tim.*, cap. 2 l. 1.

⁴⁹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super I Cor.*, cap. 14 l. 3.

⁵⁰ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Col.*, cap. 1 l. 3.

⁵¹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Mt.* [rep. Leodegarii Bissuntini], cap. 24 l. 4.

In this spirit Aquinas reads also St. Paul's concern for the Galatians, who are persuaded to return to the old law.⁵² He points out two reasons not to resist such beliefs. First, because of their devotion to Christ, which entails seeking what benefits the relationship with Jesus: they are persuaded by the Devil, who lacks goodness. Second, some people might think that if they can convince a few while the majority adheres to the truth, then nothing dangerous is happening. Aquinas clearly recommends, following St. Paul, that one ought not tolerate dangerous arguments that may persuade a few. Rather, they must be actively refuted; he writes:

They might suppose that consenting to a few is not a great matter, since it constitutes no danger. But he says that they must not consent to them at all, nor underestimate their artifices; rather they must oppose them at the start, because *a little leaven corrupts the whole lump*, i.e., those few who are persuading you. Or, this persuasion small in the beginning corrupts the whole lump, i.e., the congregation of the faithful: *neither shall any leaven or honey be burnt in the sacrifice to the Lord* (Lev 2:11).⁵³

IV. Importance of persuasion for contemporary apologetics

Aquinas' apologetics is based on the conviction that the main task of those who try to help others in their believing in God, is to remove obstacles to the faith and to prevent *irrisio infidelium*,⁵⁴ i.e., the taunting of unbelieving Christians on the grounds that they have recently justified their faith in an inadequate manner. But alongside these two tasks, Thomas points to the need to reflect on persuasion, which is not one of the techniques for gaining new believers, but the imitation of a God who act because of some reasons. It permits to bring some reasons (*rationes*) that the believer can invoke in order to justify his act of faith, although he does

⁵² J. W. THOMPSON, *Apostle of Persuasion. Theology and Rhetoric in the Pauline Letters*.

⁵³ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Gal.*, cap. V, lect. 2.

⁵⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 32, a. 1c.: „Cum enim aliquis ad probandam fidem inducit rationes quae non sunt cogentes, cedit in irrisionem infidelium, credunt enim quod huiusmodi rationibus innitatur, et propter eas credamus. Quae igitur fidei sunt, non sunt tentanda probare nisi per auctoritates, his qui auctoritates suscipiunt”.

not believe because of the force of these arguments. Therefore, it is possible to argue for faith, which, by being grace, does not mean for Aquinas that it completely ignores or renders irrelevant the participation of the human being who can respond to and cooperate with grace. Thomistic apologetics will emphasise the priority of grace, which is always first and without our merit, but which at the same time demands a human response. St Thomas is convinced that the grace of faith is given to all, but man can put obstacles to grace that do not become efficacious. This is how St Thomas explains it in *Summa contra gentiles*, evoking an evocative image:

Though a man is unable to merit or acquire the divine grace by the movement of his freewill, nevertheless he can hinder himself from receiving it. For it is said of some: They say to God: 'Depart from us; we do not desire the knowledge of thy ways' (Job 21:14); and: They rebelled against the light (Job 24:13). And since it is in the power of the free-will to hinder or not to hinder the reception of divine grace, he who places an obstacle in the way of his receiving grace is deservedly to be blamed. Because God, for his own part, is prepared to give grace to all, for he desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). But those alone are deprived of grace who place in themselves an obstacle to grace: thus, he who shuts his eyes while the sun is shining is to be blamed if an accident occurs, although he is unable to see unless the sun's light enable him to do so.⁵⁵

Faith is not an arbitrary choice: its acceptance is not a "compulsion", but a choice based on certain arguments that have convinced the will, i.e, trust to God's Revelation. Grace does not compel the will, because it must be accepted in a human way, that is, freely. In this approach Aquinas can be seen to differ from viewing the supernatural only in the key of '*contra naturam*', which has become the domain of modern thinking.⁵⁶ Since *gratia supponit naturam*, this means that it does not eliminate rationality, but confirms and transcends it. Where human persuasion fails to convince, the gift of counsel comes to the rescue, which consists in susceptibility to divine inspiration that leads to the ultimate goal.

⁵⁵ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. III, cap. 159.

⁵⁶ L. OVIEDO, "Fundamental Theology at the Crossroads", 49–71.

All these theological presuppositions that Aquinas develops lead to an understanding of apologetics not so much as ‘beating down arguments’ and defending against attacks, but showing the integral picture offered by the Christian faith. It is not a struggle “against”, but for “something” important, through which a full understanding of reality becomes possible. Christianity thus becomes persuasive, although the process of discovering this is not immediate.

V. Final remarks

The work of persuading others was not a common practice in philosophy. In commenting on “Metaphysics,” Aquinas notes a certain tendency among the philosophers of nature, who sought wisdom by observing the world and its phenomena, to conceal the truths they discovered in the form of certain stories (like Hesiod, called a “theologian” in antiquity), and others in mathematics (Plato). Thomas reasoned that this followed from the idea that only the friends can be convinced of certain truths, hidden from others (hence many reflections on God and His nature in the ancients were not communicated in writing). Herein lies a fundamental difference for St. Thomas: Christianity conveys the learned truth to others in such a way that it can be understood by others—this is what lies beneath the word persuasion, which brings it out in a way that is comprehensible to the hearer.⁵⁷ A number of theological assumptions underlie this approach.

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⁵⁷ *Sententia Metaphysicae*, lib. 3 l. 11 n. 3. See also: J. VERGARA; L. VIGURIA, “Claves teóricas de la pedagogía sapiencial bajomedieval”.

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